1: Melamid K-4 (no date) 1953 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4
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POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF TRUCIAL 'OMAN AND QATAR

ALEXANDER MELAMID

UNTIL the 1930's pirating, slave trading, and arms smuggling were the occupations of the native population on the southeast shores of the Persian Gulf, and they largely determined the status of the region in international affairs. Since then the oil industry, with its manifold economic and political aspects, has begun to replace these earlier "trades." The effect of this change offers an unusual insight into the evolution of states and their territorial and maritime sovereignty. Despite the present importance of the Persian Gulf in world affairs, information on Trucial 'Oman, and to a smaller extent on Qatar, is scarce and contradictory.

The Physical and Historical Background

Physically, the south coast of the Persian Gulf is uninviting. Shallow waters with dangerous reefs fringe the beaches, and the bars across the mouths of the many inlets and coastal creeks make them inaccessible to the smallest ocean-going vessels. The shore line forms the margin of a low, undulating plateau with a surface of sand or loose stones, which merges to the south into the even less hospitable and little-known desert of the Rub' al Khali. Occasionally the plateau is interrupted by shallow salt pans or by insignificant hills that may expose the bedrock, mainly Eocene limestone. There are no continuous wadies, or any other marked features. The low northern extension of the mountains of 'Oman, which terminates in the rugged and deeply indented peninsula of Masandam, forms the eastern boundary of the region. Rainfall is estimated at less than five inches a year, falling in a few winter showers. Temperatures on the coast are high: averages range from the high sixties in January to the nineties in July. Humidity is also high. Because of the oppressive summer weather, the oil company operating in Qatar suspends the work of its seismographic exploration crews from May to November. However, the humidity does not penetrate far into the interior, and exploratory activities in, for example, the neighboring inland oil fields of Saudi Arabia continue throughout the year.

The vegetation is scanty. Economically useful plants that grow without irrigation can feed only camels, sheep, and goats. Aside from a stable kept by the sheikh of Ajman, no horses are reported anywhere, and even the number of cattle is small.

Dr. Melamid is lecturer in economic geography on The Graduate Faculty, New School for Social Research, New York.

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133 pearl boats, avoid these waters. It is here that the principal Oman pearl banks lie. The most important islands off the Trucial Coast are Bu Musa, which contains a red ochre mine; Tunb; Sir Bu Na'air; Yas, where there is an R.A.F. emergency landing ground; and Dalmah.

132 The climate is extremely severe in the summer months. From May to October, the combined heat and humidity are very trying to Europeans; temperatures of 115° F. and humidity of 98° are common. In the winter months, from November to February, it is pleasantly cool by day and cold at night, but frost is unknown; at this time the weather on the coast is frequently boisterous. Rainfall averages about 5 in. a year, and falls chiefly in mid-winter, when storms are extremely severe. On 30th November, 1944, the Indian Meteorological department at Sharjah recorded a rainfall of 1.75 in. within twenty minutes and a wind of 78 miles an hour.

162 Tribally and racially the people of the Trucial Coast are very mixed, Arabs, Persians, Baluchis, Hindus, and a large number of Arab slaves and their progeny forming the bulk of the population. The Bedouins, who some years ago were estimated to number 8,000, are mostly confined to the open desert, although they are now more amiably disposed to the settled tribes and townships than formerly; the largest of the Bedouin tribes in Oman is that of the Beni Qitab, whose ruler is the Sheikh Mahommed bin Ali. The Bedouins live chiefly by their livestock, although some nowadays take part in pearling and fishing during the season. In winter time, when there is a fine amount of herbage for their herds, they scatter and move from encampment to encampment, but in summer they congregate in large numbers around the more copious wells in the desert. The Jiri plain in the north and Bainumah in the west, are favourite places.

241 There is little agriculture in Trucial Oman. Dates can be grown in most places, although the Arabs are extremely conservative and are averse from attempting new projects. The only large-scale date plantations are at Falaj-al-Ali and Djaidh. Inland, west of the Shimailiyah mountains and the Sir Wadhi, some cereals, wheat, tobacco and *jowari* are grown, and vegetables can be raised by means
● 231 of well irrigation. Cows, donkeys, camels, goats and sheep are kept, and plenty of poultry, but little appears to be known of diseases of the latter, and in 1944 they died in large numbers. The normal food for cattle is fish and boiled date stones, and herbage when it can be found. Except for the famous stables of Sheikh

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

231 Raschid of Al Ajman, horses are not kept in Oman on account of the difficulty of obtaining suitable fodder.

433 The industries of the Persian Gulf are pearl diving, fishing, a limited amount of canning for export, date cultivation, ship-building, ochre mining, and wool-weaving, but of these the pre-228 eminent industry is that of the pearl banks. In summer most of the 464 able-bodied men repair to the pearl banks, some returning in November to take part in the fisheries, although the majority stay at home in idleness and are supported by means of loans advanced by the boat owners and contractors. Having 'subbed' on their next season's wages, they are legally bound to work for the same pearler, and the system is such that they are in effect bound to him for life. It is no uncommon thing for a contractor to claim the services of a son whose father has been killed by a shark, or drowned, in liquidation of the debt owed by the deceased diver, and the whole business starts again through the next generation.

In July, 1944, I saw a diver who had been mauled by a shark eighteen feet below the water. His calf and the thigh of one leg had been bitten away to the bone, and he had spent five days in a [752] dhow before being brought in. The wound, which had been soaked in henna, was very putrid and full of maggots. He was placed in the sick quarters and the maggots were allowed to continue their work of devouring the rotten flesh. Within six weeks the wound had healed up sufficiently for the man to go home. He said he would return to diving again as soon as he was well!

During the journey to Ras-al-Khaimah, which we undertook in a large sailing dhow, he related some interesting facts about the Mohammedan religion and its *tabus*. The majority of Europeans, he said, often imagined that to the true follower of the Prophet the dog was anathema, not to be touched or mentioned in conversation. Now it was very true that some of the stricter sects of Islam regarded the dog as unclean, but this view was not generally held by the tribes in Oman, who were fond of their dogs, fed and treated them well, and regarded them as household pets. One should, however, always wash one's hands after touching a desert dog. Knowing our pai dog, we unequivocally agreed with this dictum, for these pariahs are never washed and, though his short brown hair looks clean and in good condition, it is usually crawling with lice and other vermin.

The pai is a descendant of the wild dog of the desert, but he has been domesticated for centuries and has all the virtues of the tamed household pet. Although exceedingly timid by disposition, he will bark fiercely at undesirable visitors and makes an excellent watch-dog for that reason, although he rarely attacks and is easily driven off. He is so accustomed to being bullied and stoned by village children, that if one merely bends down and pretends to pick up a stone he will take to his legs with a yelp. He is the laziest creature imaginable and will spend all his days lying in the sun, oblivious of the scores of flies which settle on his eyes and nose, too tired to flick them off. When approached, he will roll over on his back and stick his legs up in the air, as if to say: 'I am defenceless: do with me what you will'.

Pai dogs have very little 'character', are incurably sentimental and lacking in common sense; they have no traffic sense and are constantly run over by cars. Yet in time one grows fond of them. Like most dogs, they are loyal to one master and enjoy nothing so much as to be petted or to lie on a rug and dream. In appearance they resemble the English whippet, but have the head of a terrier, and their run is something of a trot. Their short-haired coats are of a rich golden brown, running to light fawn on the head and belly. The sheikhs breed a special kind of hunting dog, which is fast and cunning and is used for gazelle hunting. These animals are similar to the pai dog, but have sharper faces and long, silky brown hair. They are probably a cross between the pai dog and the saluki.

The sea in the creek was very calm and the gentle breeze scarcely stirred our sails, so that we took nearly twenty minutes to cross the

had lunch, but it was not possible to decline the dishes placed before us. In the centre of the dining-mat was a huge bowl of rice and steamed sheep, very fat and oily; chipatties, truffles, curry, sheep's liver, and pastry puff balls filled with honey. The sheikh presented me with a large piece of fat with his own hands, and I felt sick before it had entered my mouth.

After the meal we again washed our hands and sat drinking out of little brass cups of bitter coffee. Cigarettes were produced and all smoked except the uncle from Baraimi. The conversation, as is customary during social calls, began with polite enquiries after one's health. Rashid then recounted some of his experiences in the hunting field, and sent his son to bring a pile of fine gazelle skins, trophies of the chase; one of especial beauty and fine marking he presented to me, together with a pair of horns. The wazir, Hussein, looked as though he were tired of the conversation, and produced a blackwood reed from the folds of his *abba* and began to play a wistful little tune. Abdul bin Hamid sang in a high-pitched voice and we sat back on our cushions and listened. The tune was monotonous and without melody, but it had a weirdly fascinating rhythm.

The sheikh, whose tales of the hunt were thus rudely interrupted, grew restless; he belched aggressively and pulled at his beard. At length, losing all patience, he rose abruptly and signalled us to follow him through the courtyard. Hussein went on playing his melancholy tune, so we wandered through the fort with Rashid and his daughter. Scores of ragged children came into the courtyard to stare at us; they were nothing to do with the sheikh, unless they were children of his servants, and he took no notice of them. With his twinkling blue eyes, humorous mouth and hawk-like nose, he might have been an Eastern king, benevolent and wise, surrounded by his subjects. He had perfect teeth, stained at the edges by tobacco, and on his finely-shaped hand wore a large cornelian stone, engraved with an account of his descent. The Arabs do not as a rule have a crest or heraldic design, although some of the sheikhs display a badge, usually in the form of a crescent or sometimes a bird or lion which is engraved on seals and the backs of chairs.

Rashid on this occasion wore a very barbaric-looking turban of white and purple Kashmir wool and looked more like a pirate than ever. When we had seen over the fort, many of the rooms of which were completely bare, he conducted us to the stables

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

where he keeps his famous stud of Arabs. He has fifty stallions and mares, two of which were in foal; a few were of pure Nejd breed, some were Anazehs, and the rest mixed Arab and Rahwan (Kurdish) blood.

The stables consisted of a long, covered shed running round the inner walls; under this covering the horses are picketed during the night, but in the daytime they are allowed to stretch their legs at pleasure within the central courtyard. The majority were loose; a few, however, were tied up at their stalls, whilst some had horse-cloths over them. These cloths are necessary as a protection against the heavy morning dews; I was also told that a northerly wind will occasionally injure the animals here. About half the 'royal' stud were either in the stalls or the courtyard, the rest being out at grass.

No Arab dreams of tying up a horse by the neck; a tether replaces the halter, and one of the animal's hind-legs is encircled about the pastern by a light iron ring, furnished with a padlock and connected with an iron chain about two feet long, ending in a rope, which is fastened to the ground at some distance by an iron peg. This is the customary method, but if an animal becomes restless and troublesome a foreleg is put under similar restraint. Horses in Arabia are much less frequently vicious or refractory than in Europe, which is one reason why geldings in the desert are comparatively rare.

Raschid bin Hamid's horses were a lovely collection. Their stature was rather low; none came fully up to fifteen hands. Fourteen hands seemed about their average, but they were so exquisitely well-shaped that want of greater size seemed hardly a defect. Remarkably full in the haunches, with elegantly-shaped shoulders, they were just slightly saddle-backed, with a curve indicating springiness rather than weakness; a broad head above, tapering down to a nose rather small and sharp, with a full eye, sharp, thorn-like little ear, clean and sinewy legs, and a neat, round hoof. The mane is worn long, but is not heavy, and the tail is thrown out at a perfect arch. The prevailing colours were white, chestnut, grey, a light bay and an iron colour. Raschid proudly told me some of their pedigrees—Manakee, Siklamee, Hamdanes, Tarypee—names well known to breeders of horses throughout the world.

A few of the horses were of degenerate breed, closely resembling the 'tatties' used in India as cab horses, but they were kept for hack

work and not for hunting. The Arab horse is much gentler than the English horse, and is very obedient to knee and thigh, and to the slightest check of the halter and the voice of the rider. They are often ridden without bit or bridle, and have great speed and endurance, being able to keep going for twenty-four hours in the burning sun without water or signs of flagging.

At the sheikh's invitation I mounted a little bay mare and, without saddle, rein or stirrup, set off at full gallop, wheeled her round, and brought her up at mid-career at a dead halt without the slightest difficulty. I felt rather like a man-half of a centaur, not a distinct being. This is due to the Arab system of breaking-in.

Raschid begged to be excused for a few minutes while he made preparations for our hunting trip. Ellis and I had brought a small kit-bag each, containing a change of clothes and toilet requisites, and I had with me a Winchester repeater, kindly lent by the American commanding officer; Ellis had brought an ordinary .303 Service rifle. One of the grooms appeared with Turkish saddles and bits for two of the horses; I had chosen the mare, and Ellis a white stallion. The sheikh's horse, a fine black stallion, was fitted with a sheepskin saddle, the reins being decorated with long black and white tassels, with red cloth and feathers stuck over the head-stall, and a little short, frizzy black plume set between the ears. Raschid told me afterwards that he valued this horse at five thousand rupees.

Other servants brought out the folded tents, cooking utensils, rifles and food required for the expedition, and in a short time we were ready to start. The party consisted of Sheikh Raschid, Hussein, a secretary, Ellis and myself, a groom, and two heavily-armed guards, and we set off at a smart canter from the palace in the direction of Mahrid, with two of the sheikh's Saluki hunting dogs at our heels. In this part of the desert the surface was quite smooth and free of rocks, and riding was most pleasant. The heat was intense, however, and we had to wear sun-glasses, as the glare from the sand was most dazzling; apart from the usual short shrub there was little vegetation, and we had ridden for about five miles before we came to the large valley where the gazelle is found.

This valley is about four miles long and three miles wide, with steep, grass-covered banks on either side; the vegetation is lush, with camel grass, tamarisk, clover and wild flowers growing in profusion. Under a clump of neam trees we found a little stream trickling down from the rocks, and we tethered our horses to a

30: Gt. Britain G-5 (ca. 1918) 1920 MJ1 Saudi Arabia
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and Ghāfiri political factions (see Chap. VIII, p. 240), the former being Sunnis of the Maliki sect, the latter virtually Wahabis, though not of the militant order. Modern rifles are widely distributed both in town and country, but the traffic in arms has now been virtually suspended (cf. p. 247).

Industries and Trade

The most important industry is pearl-diving, which in summer employs most of the able-bodied men with more than 1,200 boats; though during the winter some of the divers take part in the ordinary fisheries (the second great industry of the coast), the majority take their ease, retained by the pearl-boat owners and contractors, by whom they are supported through the slack season. Agriculture employs the settled population of the interior; vegetables are raised by irrigation from wells in most places, and dates are also grown, though they seldom fully ripen S. of Ras el-Kheimah. Cereals only succeed in a few favoured spots such as *Sīr* in the Shameilīyah district. The live stock of the villages consists of camels, donkeys, cattle, sheep, and goats; horses are rare. The Bedouins subsist chiefly by their herds. In winter, when there is pasture, they roam far and wide; in the hot weather they gather about the more abundant wells, such as those of the *Jiri* plain in the N., and *Beinūnah* in the W.

Pearls are the most valuable export, and are sent almost entirely to India from the port of Dibai. The oyster-shells from which the pearls are taken come next in importance; it is questioned whether the practice of selling these, instead of at once returning them to the sea, may not in the long run tend to exhaust the pearl-banks. Dried fish are exported from Abu Dhabi.

The imports in order of their value are: grain and pulse, from India and Persia; cotton piece-goods from India; dates and date-juice from 'Irāq; coffee, chiefly from India; sugar, from or through India, and miscellaneous provisions from Persia. The only steamship port is Dibai, but the other coastal towns are used by native sea-going boats running to and from India, Persia, and 'Irāq. Inland trade with the Bedouins is of no great volume, but Trucial Oman shares that of the Bireimi oasis with the Sultanate. The coast between Ras Musandam and Abu Dhabi was formerly used as a base by smugglers of arms, bringing rifles and ammunition from Sohār through Bireimi, and loading for Persia and El-Qatar either at the coastal towns, or at lonely spots between them. Within recent years it was necessary to warn the Sheikhs of 'Ajmān, Shārjah,